

PRESBYTERIANISM ON
LONG ISLAND

A HISTORICAL ADDRESS

BY THE

REV. EPHER WHITAKER, D. D.

Printed by order of the PRESBYTERY OF LONG ISLAND
after its presentation in the Presbytery's meeting at
SETAUKET, N. Y., September 4th, 1906, in the

CELEBRATION OF THE TWO-HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
ORGANIZATION OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERY IN AMERICA

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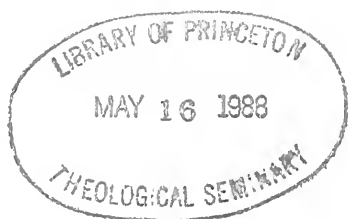
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PRESBYTERIANISM ON LONG ISLAND

PRESBYTERIANISM is defined "the faith and polity of the Presbyterian Churches, taken collectively." So it includes their system of doctrine and their form of government. In both these parts there are points which are greatly unlike each other in the Presbyterianism of various countries and different times. The Presbyterianism of Scotland is a tree, which began with the great trunk of the General Assembly, that put forth its dependent branches. It had forthwith more or less clearly defined parish bounds, and Ruling Elders with life-long terms of service. Presbyterianism in our own country is rather a river than a tree. Not a few somewhat unlike streams have united to form the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. We have taken something from Switzerland—something from France—something from Scotland, and not a little from Old England and New England, while the chief shaping force has come from the mighty men whose seed-plot was the small, but wonderful Province of Ulster.

As to the faith of Presbyterians in this country, the system of doctrine taught in John Calvin's "Institutes of the Christian Religion," sent forth in two heavy volumes by our Board of Publication, is far away in many points from the system maintained in Albert Barnes's successful "Defense" of his Presbyterian orthodoxy. The splendid system of Henry Boynton Smith is here and there unlike in substance as well as in form to the magnificent system of Charles Hodge. Both differ in many particulars from either John Dick's or Robert J. Breckinridge's, not to mention others both earlier and later, nor those of theological writers in other lands and languages than our own.

In reference to Presbyterianism on Long Island, there is need of another preliminary remark.

Some writers, who treat of Presbyterianism in America, seem disposed to be unmindful of the fact, that the Westminster Confession of Faith is an English document, made by direction of English politicians, and mainly for political purposes.

The Assembly of ministers and laymen that composed it, was summoned

for this purpose by the Parliament with the aim of establishing Presbyterianism under the civil government, as the form of the State Religion, in England, Scotland and Ireland.

The statesmen desired thereby to get rid of the Cæsarism and the Feudalism of the Roman Catholic Church, and of the razeed forms of them in the Church of England established under Queen Elizabeth and her imperious father, Henry VIII.

The members of the Assembly first took in hand their chief object, and devised the Form of Government before they wrote the Confession of Faith and the Longer and Shorter Catechisms.

The purpose of the Parliament was never attained. The tree bloomed in beauty ; but the despotism of Cromwell touched it with a blighting frost, and was death to the prospective fruitage.

Those times were not genial for the growth of Presbyterianism on Long Island among the churches of English Puritans here.

The oldest of these churches antedated the Westminster Assembly. Southold was formed in October, 1640, and Southampton the next month. Others were organized here during the years that the Assembly was in being, and near the close of the war that had continued thirty years between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants ; and which had swept away the greater part of the inhabitants from large tracts of Central Europe. For the Peace of Westphalia ended that most bloody and desolating conflict in 1648.

These early Puritan churches, besides Southold and Southampton, included Newtown, Heampstead, Easthampton, Huntington, Brookhaven and Jamaica.

They were all alike Town churches, and all doubtless Presbyterian in doctrine. Some called themselves Presbyterian. Others deemed it prudent, very early, (Hempstead, for example,) to name themselves churches of Christ only.

The Towns called and paid their respective ministers and employed them as their chief public teachers. Some at least of the Towns required the people to attend their instructions on Sundays as the State now requires the children of the proper age to attend the public schools.

No one, at that time, either in Europe or America, thought of a church apart from the control of the civil government ; and vice as well as crime was punished by the Towns.

The ministers had charge of admission to the sacraments of the Church and celebrated the marriages of the people ; for the churches generally or always had but one elder over each church, the pastoral elder.

These pastors were all scholarly men ; and most of them were men of force, high standing, leadership, and comparative wealth.

They ministered in those early times, as their successors do now, to all classes of their fellow citizens.

The earliest English-speaking ministers on the Island were undoubtedly Presbyterian in doctrine ; and it is highly probable that they were in accord with the movement of their day for Presbyterian government in England.

They were, in the order of their settlement as the earliest pastors of the churches of our Island, as follows :

John Youngs, Southold, 1640.

Abraham Pierson, Southampton, 1640.

Francis Doughty, Newtown, 1642.

Richard Denton, Hempstead, 1644.

Joseph Fordham, Hempstead, 1644.

Thomas James, Easthampton, 1648.

William Leverich, Huntington, 1658.

Zachariah Walker, Jamaica, 1662.

Nathaniel Brewster, Brookhaven, 1665.

After the permanent expulsion of the Dutch government from Manhattan by the power of England in 1674, these Puritan people of our Island became subject to the Duke of York, who followed his brother, Charles II, in the possession of the crown, as James II, in 1685.

His domination over our Island began in 1674. This change of rulers deeply affected these Puritan people. They were thus separated from their brethren of New England, to their unspeakable sorrow, and notwithstanding their strenuous resistance.

Thenceforth the churches were more or less burdened with defence against Colonial Governors, some of whom robbed the churches of Hempstead and Jamaica of their church buildings and grounds, and gave them to clergymen of the Church of England.

So, when the Revolution came, nearly all the Presbyterian pastors and people supported it, and nearly all Episcopalians opposed it, and especially the clergymen.

These churches gained a stage in advance when they became associated with an organized body of intelligent and Christian men largely independent of the civil power and devoted to the promotion of the Kingdom of God.

This new stage came to be gained in this way. Two hundred years ago Jedediah Andrews gathered in Philadelphia a Ministers' Meeting, or Presbytery, including men of American, Scotch and Irish birth, as he had previously

gathered a Presbyterian church composed of all sorts and conditions of men, uniting Presbyterians, Baptists, Independents and Quakers.

This Association of ministers had in view a kind of Theological Seminary or Ministerial Training School for preaching to one another, criticism of each other, the study of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures of the Bible, and also ecclesiastical business. It was likewise intended to be, and became, an enterprising and energetic Home Missionary Society. Its members, seven in number, manifested zeal and activity in obtaining ministers of missionary quality wherever these could be found in New England, Old England, Scotland and Ireland.

In ten years their enterprise had more than doubled their number. Then, for various reasons, and especially to shorten journeys, they voted to divide into four Meetings or Presbyteries, namely, Philadelphia, with six ministers; New Castle, with six; Snow Hill, with three; and Long Island, with two—Macnish of Jamaica and Pomeroy of Newtown. These two were directed “to use their best endeavors with their neighboring brethren that are settled there, which as yet join not with us, to join with us in erecting a fourth Presbytery.”

They deemed the pastors of these Long Island churches good enough Presbyterians to be members of their body. They had themselves no Confession of Faith and their Form of Government was imperfect, not to say in rudiment condition.

Macnish and Pomeroy persuaded George Phillips of Brookhaven to join them. These three met in Southampton, April 17, 1717, and ordained Samuel Gelston pastor of the Southampton church, more than seventy-six years after its formation.

The ministers of these Long Island Town churches at the time of the organization of the Synod of Philadelphia and of the Presbytery of Long Island, whom the Synod desired to be members of this Presbytery, were as follows, named in the order of the age of the respective churches :

Southold : Joshua Hobart, born in England ; came to America with his father, mother and three others of their children in 1635 ; son of the Rev. Peter Hobart of Hingham, Massachusetts ; brother of three other ministers, Jeremiah, Gershom and Nehemiah ; graduated at Harvard in 1650 ; went to Barbadoes in 1655 ; married there Margaret Vassel ; went to London ; returned to New England in 1669 ; became pastor of Southold, October 7, 1674 ; died February 28, 1717. For his settlement the Town built and gave him a costly house on an extremely choice site and gave him land enough to make him one of its foremost freeholders. President Stiles of Yale

College wrote of him : “ He was an eminent physician, civilian, and divine, and every way a great, learned, pious man.” He was twice married and had children. His massive tomb was built by order and at the expense of the Town.

Southampton : Samuel Gelston, born in the North of Ireland, of Scotch ancestry, in 1692 ; entered Glasgow University in 1706 and its theological department in 1710 ; licensed before coming to New England ; received as a licentiate by the Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1715, and called by the church of Southampton in 1716 ; ordained by the Presbytery of Long Island at its formation as pastor of Southampton, April 17, 1717 ; received by the New Castle Presbytery as a member in 1728 ; pioneer of Presbyterianism in the Valley of Virginia, 1735-1736. Later, he ministered in the Highlands of New York.

Newtown : Samuel Pomeroy, born at Northampton, Massachusetts, September 16, 1687 ; graduated at Yale in 1705 ; ordained for Newtown, November 30, 1709 ; died there June 30, 1744. His son, the Rev. Dr. Benjamin Pomeroy, became and continued for many years until his death the pastor of Hebron, Connecticut.

Easthampton : Nathaniel Hunting, born in Dedham, Massachusetts, November 15, 1675 ; graduated at Harvard, 1693 ; came to Easthampton in 1696 ; permanently settled, September 13, 1699 ; resigned his charge in 1746 ; died in 1753. Two of his sons became ministers. He was active and prominent in various kinds of business as well as a learned and faithful pastor.

Huntington : Eliphalet Jones, son of the Rev. John Jones of Concord, Massachusetts, and later of Fairfield, Connecticut. He was born at Concord, November 6, 1640. Having been, in January, 1676, invited to become the pastor of Huntington, he accepted the invitation, June 10, 1677. The Rev. Ebenezer Prime became his colleague, June 5, 1723, and succeeded him at his death, June 5, 1731.

Jamaica : George Macnish, born in Scotland ; entered the University of Glasgow, March 1, 1698. He and John Hampton, an Irishman, but fellow student of Macnish in the University of Glasgow, were sent, by the Presbyterian ministers of London, to America, as missionaries. They arrived in Maryland as companions of the Rev. Francis Makemie, in 1705. The latter had induced the London ministers to send them and support them for two years. These men were three of the seven original members of the Ministers' Meeting or Presbytery of Philadelphia. Macnish preached during five years in the southeast part of Maryland and then came to Jamaica in 1710.

The Presbyterian people had been robbed of their meeting house by Edward Hyde, Lord Cornbury, the royal Governor of New York ; and Macnish had to wage a long and strenuous battle against the force and devices of his people's foes. He manifested great alertness, wisdom and ability of various kinds, and secured the support of earnest friends of freedom and righteousness in New England and Old England. In 1714, George I, the great grandson of James I, came to the throne of Great Britain, and the persecution of Macnish and the church of Jamaica ceased. But they did not recover the possession of their meeting house until 1727. Mr. Macnish continued to be the pastor until his death in 1722.

Brookhaven : George Phillips, son of the Rev. Samuel Phillips of Rowley, Massachusetts, and grandson of the eminent and Rev. George Phillips, the founder of Watertown, Massachusetts, who came in 1630 to New England in company with Governor John Winthrop and Sir Richard Staltonhall. Our George Phillips was born at Rowley, June 3, 1664 ; graduated at Harvard in 1686. He preached thereafter in several places, and especially at Jamaica, Long Island, from 1693 to 1697, when he removed to Brookhaven. After preaching five years in this place, he was ordained its pastor, April 13, 1702, and so continued until his death in 1739. In his latest years he was a member of the Presbytery of New York. He left descendants, and there is a fine portrait of him painted in oil.

Bridgemanpton : Ebenezer White, son of Ebenezer and Hannah (Phillips) White, born at Weymouth, Massachusetts, in 1672 ; graduated at Harvard, 1692 ; ordained at Bridgemanpton its earliest minister, October 9, 1695 ; resigned his charge in 1748 ; and died in 1756 ; father of the Rev. Sylvanus White, pastor of Southampton.

As an indication of the substantial Presbyterian character of these churches, it is worthy of special notice, that all of them ceased in due time to be Town churches, and became fully organized Presbyterian churches with ordained ruling elders. Their union and subjection to higher organizations on civil grounds ceased, and their union and subordination to superior bodies were established on religious foundations, and so they became constituent parts of Presbytery and Synod.

It was difficult for the original Presbytery to induce its churches to elect ruling elders, or assistants of the ministers, as they were often called. It was even more difficult to persuade them to keep records and submit them from time to time for presbyterial review.

It is impossible to ascertain the measure of spiritual life and devotion of the ministers and members of the churches in those early generations. Their

Christian character was probably not eminent. Their outward conditions were depressing. The six huge volumes of ecclesiastical history recently published by the State of New York, under the direction of the State's historian, relate to transactions throughout the Colonial period. They fail to indicate the highest attainments in the Christian life among the clergy and people of the Province. They pertain, however, far more to the officers and congregations of the Church of Holland and of the Church of England than to those of Presbyterianism. The doings of Whitefield and his most conspicuous converts may throw some light on this point.

There were in his day on the south side of the Island four of these early English Puritan churches, Southampton, Easthampton, Hempstead and Bridgehampton. On the north side, six, Southold, Brookhaven, Huntington, Jamaica, Newtown, Matituck. There was in addition a house of worship and probably an organized church at Cutchogue.

The west end of the Island had a Collegiate Reformed Dutch church with two ministers and three houses of worship, one of them at Jamaica.

The ten or eleven Puritan churches included perhaps four hundred communicants.

Whitefield came to America in 1739. His skill in attracting public attention was marvelous. He preached a few sermons, (some of them forty times), in different places. They were adapted to produce emotion and rouse excitement among the people. They abounded in denunciation; and our politicians know that this is the road to popularity. Among his converts were Jonathan Barber and James Davenport, the latter being the pastor of Southold. Both became insane; but Davenport later recovered his health and reason.

They followed the example of Whitefield; went from place to place; took care to attract the public attention; to cause excitement; to denounce those who would not do their bidding.

Davenport abandoned his duties as the Southold pastor, and the church ended his relation to it. He succeeded in producing disorder in all the churches of Suffolk County except Southampton. Dilapidation was everywhere. It was necessary to build anew from the foundations.

Happily the chief ministers of the churches had fitness for the work. Six of them, in April, 1747, organized the Presbytery of Suffolk County, and forthwith began to bring the churches into Presbyterian order and Christian living. Spiritual growth and precious fruits soon appeared.

In 1748, they ordained James Brown as pastor of Bridgehampton, and installed William Throop pastor of Southold; licensed Nehemiah Greenman and directed him to preach throughout twenty-five miles of the South Side

from Quogue to Mastic. They also licensed Thomas Payne and directed him to preach at Cutchogue, where he grew to be the faithful pastor and the beloved physician of the people. In the same year, the Presbytery obtained Azariah Horton for the Indians, David Youngs for Brookhaven, both Southold men, and licensed Naphtali Daggett for Smithtown. Two years later the Presbytery organized the Smithtown church and ordained Mr. Daggett its first pastor.

In May, 1749, this Presbytery joined the New School Synod of New York.

In 1752, it organized Union Parish by uniting Mattituck and Occabaug, and made Joseph Park its pastor.

In five years it had changed from gloom to brightness the religious face of the greater part of the Island.

The pastors were abounding in missionary labor as well as cultivating their own parishes with diligence and energy, and giving aid to the brethren in Queens County who were manifesting increase of vitality and fruitfulness.

Shelter Island, Oyster Ponds, Wading River, Mount Sinai, Fresh Pond, Patchogue, Moriches, Canoe Place, Sag Harbor, and other parts of the Island were the missionary fields cultivated by the personal toil of these energetic and zealous pastors, while their own congregations murmured not, even though their ministers were often away from home to labor in these missionary fields.

In 1754, Benjamin Talmage was ordained pastor of Brookhaven to succeed David Youngs, deceased.

The next year, the church of Moriches was organized, Abner Reeve ordained its pastor, and Ketchabonuck included within the scope of his activity.

It was characteristic of the Presbytery and of the time that in 1758 it ordered its members in succession to supply the church of Jamaica, (which was in the New York Presbytery), while the pastor of this church, Elihu Spencer, was serving as chaplain in the army fighting against French and Indians to decide whether North America should be mainly Protestant and speak English, or Roman Catholic and speak French. To that war the Presbyterian churches of Long Island, with earnest patriotism, sent both soldiers and provisions generously. In proportion to their population and resources, that war cost New England and New York more than did the war for Independence of the Colonies from Great Britain, or that to destroy the slave-power's Confederacy.

Soon after the war against France and the fall of Quebec, the College of New Jersey began to do what Harvard and Yale had previously done, and

Yale continued doing, namely, to supply candidates for the ministry on the Island, so that four Princeton men were under the care of the Presbytery at the same time. One of them, Moses Baldwin, soon received ordination.

In 1759, Ezra Reeve and Samson Occum were ordained. The latter, an Indian, became famous both in this country and in England.

In 1764, came the great religious movement which burst forth as a life-giving fountain in Easthampton and spread over all Long Island and far beyond it. In two years, it doubled the membership and strength of many churches far and near.

Thus, in twenty years after the formation of the Suffolk Presbytery, there had been made, from Montauk to Newtown, a religious revolution as marvelous in degree and excellence as the civil revolution which soon thereafter followed and made the separate Colonies one united Nation, with freedom in Church and State from the Penobscot to the Mississippi.

This revolution for freedom in religious and civil affairs was a grand achievement, impossible without the enthusiastic support of the Presbyterian and Congregational ministers and churches of the country.

It brought destruction, like an earthquake and fire, on Long Island. For seven burdensome and ruinous years, British troops held it captive. Churches were demolished. Public worship largely suspended. Pastors and other prominent men driven away. The Presbytery did not meet at any time throughout the seven years of captivity. Our Presbyterians paid a great price for our liberty.

It required a generation, after peace came, to restore order, industry, virtue and prosperity. Improvement lagged.

In 1790, the name of the Presbytery was changed from Suffolk to Long Island, and all our churches on the Island were put under its care.

The Presbytery commenced to review Sessional records in 1794; and a few years later extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly first appeared for examination.

Early in the new century discipline for intemperance was commenced, and in 1811 the Presbytery voted that ardent spirits and wine should be no part of its entertainment.

In 1810, it determined to print and circulate pamphlets and tracts.

The Synod in 1809, transferred the three churches west of Suffolk County with their ministers to the New York Presbytery, and the Long Island Presbytery's bounds became those of Suffolk County, the same as the Suffolk Presbytery's at first.

Enterprise was shown in 1811, when the Presbytery determined that each

of its pastors should perform yearly missionary labor for thirteen days on the Island at their own expense. It made this order on motion of the pastors of Southold and Cutchogue, who sent to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions the first contributions, (as the Board's Treasurer's books attest), ever made by churches to this Board.

In the same year, the Presbytery voted to continue the common practice of admitting delegates from churches having Presbyterian pastors, but no ruling elders, thus following the example of the Presbytery of Philadelphia from its formation in 1706, when it had neither Confession of Faith nor established Form of Government.

A school officer in 1815 objected for the first time to the ministers of the Presbytery's teaching the Catechism in the public schools.

The communicant members of the churches in 1821 numbered one thousand and one hundred and fifty-four (1154).

The Presbytery in 1832 voted for a division of the body, and the churches and ministers of Huntington, Smithtown, Islip and Brookhaven were made the Second Presbytery of Long Island.

This year and the next were marked by great revivals in nearly all the churches. Some of them doubled the number of their communicants; and as the Presbytery in the preceding generation barred ardent spirits and wine, it now took ground against tobacco in all its forms.

By a vote of two to one the Presbytery in 1838 protested against the division of the whole church, and the next sent no delegates to the General Assembly, in order to avoid supporting either party.

The next year, the division having been fully accomplished, it sent delegates to the New School Assembly, the majority deeming the Old School party mainly blameworthy for the disruption.

Thereupon four ministers withdrew and formed the Old School Presbytery of Long Island. Then one asked: "What is the ground of division?" The reply was: "There is no 'ground' of division. The *water* of division is Peconic Bay, the north side of the Bay being New School and the south side Old School." This line of separation was due to the fact that the ministers of the Hamptons were all men who had been trained in the Princeton Theological Seminary, whose early Professors were born and reared in slave-holding States and were mainly in accord with Southern Theologians, rather than New Englanders.

The Second Presbytery, for the most part, agreed with them, and the Old School Synod united it with the Old School Presbytery of Long Island. These two Presbyteries, each with the same name, worked side by side fraternally thirty years.

The first Presbyterian church in Brooklyn was organized in 1822. The place increased rapidly thereafter and in 1834 received a city charter. Its church history does not fall within our present view.

The Old School Presbytery, in 1865, moved for reunion. Slavery, (not in name, but substantially), a principal cause of the great division in the preceding generation, was now dead ; and Presbyterians of the North could unite. They could do this all the better because the New School, who had formerly been disposed to work in various ways with other denominations, had in large measure, abated their desire for it. Hence there was, on Long Island, perfect readiness for reunion. The happy accomplishment of it produced new Presbyterial arrangements. The Presbytery of Nassau and the Synod of Long Island were organized in 1870. This new Synod, including all the churches on the Island, was eminently active and fruitful until all the several Synods in the State were united in one great delegated body, the present Synod of New York.

In 1880, the Long Island Presbytery obtained incorporation under the authority of the State, but it has had need to hold but little property.

The Presbyterian part of the people on the Island east of Brooklyn has nearly always increased proportionally with more rapidity than the whole population. It now includes fifty-five ministers, fifty-two churches, and eight thousand two hundred and thirteen communicants (8213). Its increase has been little hindered by the need of judicial proceedings against its ministers for heresy, disorder or immorality. The Presbyterians have included a conspicuously large part of the most prominent and worthy citizens.

During the long course of two hundred and sixty-six revolving and successive years the conditions and experiences of Presbyterianism on Long Island have made it desirable to improve some of its less important features, as to both faith and polity ; but there has been no fundamental and transforming change. It rests, as it has rested all its years, on the immovable and indestructible Rock ; “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.”

